From Believers to Muslims:
Confessional Self-Identity
in the Early Islamic Community

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I.

Studies of early Islam, by Muslims and non-Muslim scholars alike, have almost without exception taken as axiomatic that Islam from its earliest days constituted a separate religious confession distinct from others—in particular, distinct from Judaism, Christianity, Magianism, and of course from the *mushrikūn*, those who "associate other beings with God." The many manifest similarities, in both religious beliefs and ritual practices, between Islam and some of these other confessional faiths, particularly Judaism and Christianity, have forced scholars to clarify the range and meaning of this assumed confessional distinctness of early Islam—something they have approached in dramatically different ways, depending upon other interpretive assumptions they have held. Those scholars who, for want of a better term, we may call "traditional

"Orientalists,"[1] tended to view the relationship in terms of Islam's "borrowings" from earlier monotheistic faiths, and even became engaged in a kind of competition among themselves to prove whether the predominant or formative "influence" upon Muhammad, the Qur'an, and early Islam came from Judaism or from Christianity.[2] Traditionally-minded Muslim scholars, for their part, have also insisted upon Islam's primordial distinctness, not only from the *mushrikūn* but also from the other monotheist confessions, but have either resorted to a religious (rather than a historical) explanation of obvious similarities of belief and practice existing between Islam and these other faiths,[3] or, if pressed for a historical explanation, have passed over the question in embarrassed silence.

In this essay, I would like to marshal some scattered evidence that appears to suggest a somewhat different view. I will attempt to show that Muhammad and his early followers first thought of themselves as a *community of Believers* (Arabic *mu'minūn*), composed of all those who shared Muhammad's intense belief in one God and in the impending arrival of the Last Day, and who joined together to carry out what they saw as the urgent task of establishing righteousness on earth—at least within their own community of Believers, and, when possible, outside it—in preparation for the End. The Believers' basic ideas obviously meant that certain people would, by definition, stand outside their community—in particular, *mushrikūn*, who in their *shirk* denied the absolute unity of God; but, I will try to show that *the community of Believers was originally conceptualized independent of confessional identities.*[1] Some were what we might call "non-denominational" Believers—that is, Believers who were reformed *mushrikūn* or others with no prior affiliation to one of the recognized monotheist confessions. Believers, however, could be members of any one of several religious confessions—Christians or Jews, for example—if the doctrines of their religious confession were consonant with strict monotheism and not too inimical to the Believers' other basic ideas. What mattered to the Believers was not a person's confessional identity, but whether he or she shared their belief in the One God, Creator of the World and Judge at the End of Time, and their conviction that the Day of Judgment was near, or at least rapidly nearing. These beliefs

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1. I do not intend the word "Orientalist" as a pejorative here, although some readers may be inclined to understand it as such; by it I merely mean those Western (or Western-trained) scholars who devoted themselves to the study of Islam and the "Orient."

2. Some noteworthy examples: Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); W. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Korans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922); Tor Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum," *Kyrkshistorisk årsskrift* 23-25 (1923-25); Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1926); Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1933); Karl Ahrens, *Muhammad als Religionsstifter* (Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1935)[= *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, XIX. Band, No. 4]; etc. Geo Widengren has stressed the Iranian and Gnostic contribution to Islam, e.g. his *Muhammad, The Apostle of God, and His Ascension* (Uppsala and Wiesbaden, 1955). R. B. Serjeant, has stressed the *jāhili* Arabian component in many studies, e.g. "Haram and Hawtah, The Sacred Enclave in Arabia," in *Mélanges Taha Husayn* (Cairo, 1962) 41-58. A valuable survey and evaluation of these and other approaches is Tryggve Kronholm, "Dependence and Prophetic Originality in the Koran," *Orientalia Suecana* 31-32 (1982-83), 47-70.

3. By "religious explanation" I mean the Muslim doctrine that God had sent His revelations to communities before Muhammad, including to the Jews and Christians, and that the Torah and Gospels are to be seen as garbled, but nonetheless recognizable, versions of the revelations enshrined in the Qur'an—hence the similarities.

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1. Günter Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad* (Erlangen: Hannelore Lüling, 1981; 2nd ed. 1993) and *Über den Ur-Qur'ān* (Erlangen: Hannelore Lüling, 1974) argues that Muhammad espoused an archaic (essentially Jewish-Christian) theology that was a reaction against the dominant hellenized Christianity of Arabia. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) argue that Islam emerged from the confluence of a Jewish messianic movement and a nativist movement of Arabian tribesmen. Moshe Sharon, "The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land," in Sharon (ed.), *Pillars of Smoke and Fire: The Holy Land in History and Thought* (Johannesburg, 1986), 225-35, has also emphasized the beginnings of Islam as a movement of strictly monotheistic Believers. Sharon, however, sees the early Believers as consisting of several originally autonomous communities (Syria, Medina, Kufa, Yamama, etc.). In these ideas, he may be following the lead of John Wansbrough (*Qur'anic Studies* [London, 1977] and *The Sectarian Milieu* [London, 1978]), but Wansbrough's works are written—intentionally, it seems—in such a way as to make it unclear just what the historical implications of his ideas are. As far as I can tell, Sharon assumes that the Believers were a group distinct from Christians, Jews, etc., although he does see them as closely associated (p. 228: "Around the core of the *mu'minūn* community [in Umayyad times] was a large contingent of Christian Arabs, Jews, and Samaritans . . ."). Although I disagree with each of these interpretations in a variety of important ways, my own interpretation owes much to them, particularly because they led the way in challenging the dogmatic formulations of the traditional Islamic view, the broad contours of which had generally been embraced also by Western scholars. Among earlier Western writers, Tor Andrae seems to have held, but not developed, a conception of the early community as not yet having a clearly defined confessional identity; e.g., *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1918), 245, where he speaks of "the growing self-consciousness of the Islamic community."

they embraced with a passionate intensity, and in the heat of that passion lesser religious notions—the expectation of the arrival of the Davidic messiah, for example, or the idea that Jesus had, long ago, been that messiah—withered into relative insignificance, at least for a time, particularly when it came to the practical work of building the community. These other religious ideas became mere details, quibbling over which could only distract them from the crucial and urgent task of building with other Believers a righteous community of those hoping to be saved when the Hour came. It was only later—apparently during the third quarter of the first century A.H., a full generation or more after the founding of Muhammad's community—that membership in the community of Believers came to be seen as a confessional identity in itself—when, to use a somewhat later formulation of religious terminology, being a Believer and Muslim meant that one could not also be a Christian, say, or a Jew.[1]

Given the present state of our understanding of the sources for this period, I will not be able to prove this hypothesis conclusively here—all the more so because, if we assume for the moment the validity of the hypothesis, we realize that the Muslim community, once it had crystallized from the community of Believers to form a separate confessional group distinct from Christians, Jews, and others, would have taken great pains to project back into the story of its origins those features that had come to be decisive in establishing that separate identity and to obliterate or disguise any obvious traces of the "pre-confessional" character of the community of Believers.[2]

It will be helpful to summarize here my provisional view of some of the concepts that the Believers adhered to, and the terms in which they were expressed, since these concepts and terms will occur repeatedly throughout the discussion to follow.[3] As already stated, the Believers (mu'minūn) insisted that there was only one God, who was creator of man and the physical world, and who would mete out reward and punishment on the day

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1. I will clarify my understanding of the early usage of this terminology (particularly *muslim*) below.
2. Foremost among the factors that were crucial in establishing Islam's character as a distinct confession were (1) its decisive rejection of the Trinity, and (2) its commitment to Muhammad's status as prophet. These factors will be discussed below.
3. A full explanation of my understanding of these terms, based on a thorough examination of their use in early texts, would take far too much space to include here, and will have to wait for a separate study. I beg the reader's indulgence.

of judgment (yawm al-dīn). Many passages in the Qur'an, particularly the "Meccan" verses, also suggest that Muhammad and his followers believed that the Last Day was not something in the vague and distant future, but was imminent.[1] Such apocalypticist beliefs were widespread in the Near East at this time,[2] and in Muhammad's case could have been a reaction against the perceived sinfulness of the world—what, in another context, has been called "conversionist" eschatological prophecy.[3] It seems plausible to consider the sense of foreboding and urgency that accompanied belief in the impending end of the world to have been the principal source of the energy and dynamism of the early community of Believers.

In order to ensure their salvation at the impending Judgment, the Believers strove to create a community (umma) that lived in piety or righteousness (taqwā), that is, strictly in accordance with the guidance (hudā) provided by God's law. God's law had been revealed repeatedly through history—to the Children of Israel through their prophets, and to Jesus, no less than to Muhammad—and was therefore enshrined not only in the Qur'an,

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1. An early, extensive effort to establish this was made in Paul Casanova, *Mahomet et la fin du monde* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1911). Casanova argued that Muhammad thought the Last Day would occur in his own lifetime. A. J. Wensinck, "Muhammad und die Propheten," *Acta Orientalia* 2 (1924), 168-198, pp. 170-80, states that it cannot be demonstrated that Muhammad expected the Last Day in his own lifetime, but, at least in the Meccan period, he did think it was nearing—see, for example, the opening of Sūrat al-Qamar (54). See also Lawrence I. Conrad, "Portents of the Hour: Hadith and History in the First Century A.H.," *Der Islam* (forthcoming). On eschatological aspects of Muhammad's preaching generally: Otto Pautz, *Muhammeds Lehre von der Offenbarung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1898), 201-220; Wensinck, "Muhammed und die Propheten," 179-182; Tor Andrae, "Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum," *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 23 (1923), 149-206; 24 (1924), 213-92; 25 (1925), 45-112, esp. 24 (1924), 213-246. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 106-120, discusses Muhammad's eschatology from a completely non-apocalypticist perspective, reflecting later orthodox attitudes.
2. Cf. Donner, "The Sources of Islamic Conceptions of War," in John Kelsay and James Turner Johnson (eds.), *Just War and Jihad* (Westport, Connecticut, 1991), 31-69, esp. 43-48.
3. See David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 126-129. I do not find convincing the view of early Islam as essentially a "nativist" movement of Arabs—an argument most cogently presented by Patricia Crone in *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 247. The nativist interpretation fails to explain why, according to the earliest documentary evidence, members of the movement should have referred to themselves consistently not as Arabs, but as Believers; or why, in the Qur'an, there is (a) no reference whatsoever to an Arab identity, (b) a negative estimation of the bedouins (a'rāb), and (c) an emphasis on piety and rejection of kinship identies as the basis of community.

but also in the Torah and the Gospel. The general term for this divine law—in whatever version (Torah, Gospel, Qur'an)—was dīn.[1]

The term dīn has a variety of meanings in Qur'anic usage.[2] In some passages, it seems to have the meaning of "religion," but in others it clearly means "judgment, verdict"—most obviously in the many instances where it occurs as part of the compound yawm al-dīn, "day of judgment, Last Day"; and in a number of others it may mean "obedience" (esp. to God).[3] But in many other passages, it seems to mean "law" or "statutes." (In many such passages it is often translated, mistakenly I believe, as "religion" rather than "law";[4] but there are a few passages where virtually all interpreters recognize that it must mean "law"—for example, Sūrat Yūsuf (12), 76). It is worth noting that dīn in the sense of "judgment" or "law" conforms well with the most frequent meanings of dīn in Aramaic and some other Semitic languages.[5] In a few passages, the Qur'an itself even seems to clarify that dīn means law, in the sense of statutes or legal practices; for example, Sūrat al-Tawba (9), 11, where it is associated with the fulfillment of ritual laws: "But if [certain mushrikīn] repent and perform prayer and pay

1. Cf. Q. 42: 13.
2. The word dīn is discussed in Arthur Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938; reprint Lahore: Al-Biruni, 1970), 131-33; Toshihiko Izutsu, God and Man in the Koran (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964; reprint New York: Arno, 1980), 219-229. Building on Izutsu, Frederick Mathewson Denny, "The Meaning of Ummah in the Qur'an," History of Religions 15 (1975), 34-70, takes dīn to mean obedience to God in general and to cultic practice in particular.
3. Esp. those with phrases like "invoke Him [God], being sincere (or uniquely devoted?) to Him in obedience" (wa-d'ū-hu mukhliṣīn lahu al-dīna) (Q. 7:29). However, the Qur'an also used aṭā'a for "to obey"; cf. Q. 49:14.
4. Cf. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon (8 vols., London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863-1893; reprinted Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), s.v. "dāna": dīna 1, "he was, or became, obedient; he obeyed"; dīna bi-dīnihim, "he followed them in their religion." s.v. dīn: "obedience; state of abasement; submissiveness; obedience to and the service of God." However, later Muslim exegetes' preference for "religion" rather than "law" as the meaning of dīn in the Qur'an, which this entry reflects, may have been rooted in their desire to conceal the implications these Qur'anic passages had for the nature of the original community of Believers. Yehuda Nevo, in Y. Nevo, Z. Cohen, and D. Heftmann, Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev 1 (Medreshet Ben-Gurion: IPS Ltd., 1993), 6, discusses other meanings of dīn, including, occasionally, "community, social group, faction"—but the word is not used in this sense in the Qur'an.
5. Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1990), p. 147: "law, justice, judgment, case, cause, lawsuit, torture, exegetical interpretation." Payne Smith, Thesaurus Syriacum (Oxford, 1879-1901) I, 843: "1. judicium; 2. norma, jus/statium/religio, lex; 3. lis, causa; 4. ratio, modus." The Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, 3, 150-156: "1. decision, verdict, judgment, punishment; 2. legal practice, law, article of law; 3. case, lawsuit, 4. claim (in sense of justified claim); 5. court"

zakāt/alms, then [they are] your brethren in dīn."

The Qur'anic term for someone who strove to live in obedience to the law seems to have been muslim—literally, "one who submits." Islām, then, originally meant submission to God's will, in the specific sense of living in obedience to God's law. To submit to God, in other words, was to submit to the dictates of His law. Muslim and mu'min /Believer often went together—one would expect that a Believer would try to live by the law—but, it is clear from some passages in the Qur'an that the two terms were not simply synonyms. Sūrat al-Ḥujarāt (49), 14, for example, states: "The bedouins have said, 'āmannā [we Believe].' Say [to them]: 'You do not Believe; rather, say 'aslamnā [we have submitted];' and' Belief [īmān] has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey [wa-in tuṭī'ū . . .] God and his Apostle . . ." etc. Since according to our interpretation the muslim is one who has submitted to God's law, and since God's law has been revealed many times to various apostles, it is not surprising that in Qur'anic usage the term muslim could be applied not only to those who follow Qur'anic law, but also to those who may follow the Law as enshrined in the Torah or Gospel or any earlier revelation. Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3), 67, for example, says that Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, but rather a ḥanīf muslim. The phrase ḥanīf muslim is instructive; muslim is certainly not a noun, but a modifier of the much-debated noun ḥanīf. This adjectival or participial function suggests that muslim, in this passage at least, cannot mean a specific religious confession or an adherent to one, but rather designates a quality or behavior that attaches to the ḥanīf—in our view, the quality of being obedient to God's law. That is, the passage is apparently saying that Abraham obeyed neither the law of the Torah nor that of the Gospel—appropriately, inasmuch as Abraham lived before either Torah or Gospel were sent down. Rather, Abraham was a ḥanīf[2] who obeyed God's ordinances. Islām was, at least in this passage,

1. The text is awkward here: qālu aslamnā wa lammā yadkhuli l-imānu fi qulūbikum. Perhaps the "wa" (alone, or in conjunction with the following lammā?) should be understood as meaning "as long as," rather than merely "and?"
2. Ḥanīf apparently means "one who is not part of the scriptural tradition" or "one who has not yet received God's revelation." On this, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad, His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in Toufic Fahd (ed.), La vie du prophète Mahomet, Colloque de Strasbourg (octobre 1980)(Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 99-146, at 118-21. Also Wensinck, "Muhammad und die Propheten," 191.

not yet a term for a particular religious confession.[1]

Muhammad's community in Yathrib, then, consisted of Believers in God and the Last Day (*mu'minūn*), striving to live by the revealed Law. Some of these Believers, being Jews, could observe the law of the Torah—i.e., follow rituals prescribed in the Torah.[2] Other Believers, who were not Jews, observed the law as revealed in the Qur'an; since they did not have a pre-existing collective identity like that of the Jews, they were called, by default, *muslims* when the context related to their observance of Qur'anic law.

Disputes among the righteous Believers in the community were to be settled by Muhammad, who served as the community's arbiter or judge (*ḥakam*) of disputes and as the community's supreme political authority.[3]

If this new interpretation is to hold, two crucial points must be established. The first is to demonstrate the multi-confessional inclusiveness of the early community of Believers—in itself a two-sided undertaking. On the one hand, we must show that particular pieces of evidence (e.g., passages in the Qur'an) that have usually been taken as evidence that Believers constituted—indeed, had to constitute—a confession and community separate and distinct from those of other monotheists, can be understood differently, and in such a way that they permit the notion of an early community of Believers characterized by multi-confessional inclusiveness. On the other hand, we should show that this was not only theoretically possible, but actually true: that the ranks of early Believers did, in fact, include some Christians, Jews, and

1. This adjectival sense of *muslim* survives in some *hadiths*; e.g., Nasā'i, *Sunan* (ed. Hasan Muhammad al-Mas'ūdī, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d.) 7, 88 middle: among the "great sins" the prophet lists "killing of the submitting (or law-abiding) person" (*qatl al-nafs al-muslima*).

2. Presumably, Christian Believers in the early community were similarly allowed to live and judge disputes by the Gospel; cf. Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 47: the *ahl al-injīl* establish rulings (*yaḥkumu*) by what God sent down in it. Whether we wish to understand them as Judaeo-Christians, that is, as Christians who still observed the law of the Torah, or as Pauline Christians who, while rejecting the Torah still had moral, ethical, and to some extent legal guidelines to follow (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount), we can leave unresolved for the present. On Judaeo-Christians in Arabia, see Shlomo Pines, "Notes on Islam and Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 135-152. I am indebted to Patricia Crone for raising these issues for me (personal communication, May, 1994).

3. Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 41-43, discussed below, refers to this.

perhaps other monotheists. The second point that must be established is that Muhammad's role was understood within the community of Believers in such a way that other monotheists would not immediately have turned against it—as, for example, they would have if the Believers had claimed that Muhammad was divine. The next section (II) of this paper will, therefore, examine Qur'anic passages that seem to support the notion that Muhammad's original community of Believers could, in principle, include members of the *ahl al-kitāb*. Section III will examine the Qur'anic passages that pose the greatest problems for our interpretation, and will attempt to neutralize the force of some them by exploiting the distinction between theological consistency and social or communal cohesion; I will admit that this strikes me as the weakest and least systematic point of my synthesis, but for the moment I can see no other way to overcome the apparent contradictions in the evidence.[1] Section IV will examine some crucial clauses in the so-called "Constitution of Medina" that state clearly that Muhammad's community in Yathrib included Jews. Section V will examine the question of Muhammad's status as apostle and/or prophet, and its implications for confessional distinctness, and will consider the testimony of some documentary and non-Islamic sources of the first century A.H. Section VI will note, in brief, some additional evidence from the early Islamic period that seems to fit the interpretation advanced here, and will close by drawing some general implications for the history of the early Islamic period.

II.

Let us turn, then, to the Qur'an. For the purposes of the present discussion, I shall assume that the Qur'an text, as it now exists, is virtually a document dating to the very earliest years of the Muslim community (community of Believers)—that is, that the text we now have was codified either during the life of Muhammad, or within a few decades of his death. I shall not enter here into the question of the integrity of the Qur'an text. It is possible—indeed, likely—that some, if not all, of the difficulties posed by the Qur'an for

1. No other way, that is, except to adjust our understanding of the timetable of Qur'anic revelation, which we have, for the present, set aside as a tactic: see the beginning of section II, below.

our interpretation could be eliminated by considering the Qur'an to be a text that crystallized over a somewhat longer period than the traditional view allows.[1] To do so, however, would require us to resolve so many issues about the text itself that we would never get to the question at hand. In the present essay, therefore, I will assume the Qur'an's integrity and relatively early date, and see how far we can proceed with our hypothesis on this basis. I shall also eschew here any attempt to correlate different parts of the Qur'an text with the various chronologies of Qur'anic revelation proposed by Nöldeke-Schwally, Bell, or traditional Muslim exegetes.

Even a superficial perusal of the Qur'anic passages that deal with Jews, Christians, and (occasionally) other monotheists, including passages referring more generally to the *ahl al-kitāb* or "people(s) of the Book," reveals an apparent ambivalence, or lack of uniformity, in the Qur'anic attitude toward these groups; that is, some passages are quite positive in their evaluation of the *ahl al-kitāb* or of some specific group of them, whereas others are quite negative. On the basis of an examination of all Qur'anic verses referring to the *ahl al-kitāb*, however, Albrecht Noth has determined that when the Qur'an refers to the *ahl al-kitāb* in general, the tone of the passage is usually positive, whereas verses with negative overtones usually refer to *a part* of the *ahl al-kitāb*.[2] This suggests that the Qur'an's ambivalence is traceable not to the *ahl al-kitāb* as such, but rather to the

1. I do not find convincing the revisionist theories of the Qur'an and its date proposed by John Wansbrough (*Qur'anic Studies*, Oxford, 1977). This still leaves a considerable scope for differences of opinion on the character and date of compilation of the Qur'an, however. Luling, *Ur-Qur'an*, argues that the Qur'an text enshrines many pre-Islamic textual elements, reworked in the lifetime of Muhammad; John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), considers the Qur'an to have been codified in written form by Muhammad; traditional Muslim scholars and many non-Muslim scholars as well hold that the Qur'an text was not codified by Muhammad, but was drawn together within a few decades of his death—sometimes with scribal errors: see most recently Bellamy, "Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," *JAOS* 114 (1993), 562-573). Any effort to settle this debate would obviously require a full-length study and cannot be attempted here. Even among Muslims the discussion continues; for a recent contribution, see Hossein Modarressi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'an: A Brief Survey," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), 5-39.

2. Albrecht Noth, "Wer gibt die *gizya* in Sure 9.29?." He includes in his analysis passages with phrases such as *alladhīna ūtū al-kitāb*, etc. The late Professor Noth kindly sent me a draft of the text (but not the notes) of this article, which was originally read for a conference on the Qur'an but not published with the volume of conference papers. Unfortunately, Professor Lawrence I. Conrad, who is executor of Noth's professional papers in Hamburg, was not able to find any record of the paper or its intended place of publication in Noth's extensive *Nachlass*, and it does not seem to have been published.

righteous or sinful behavior of some *ahl al-kitāb*; that is, it leaves open the possibility that *ahl al-kitāb* could be among the Believers.

In support of our hypothesis, let us begin with Sūrat al-Baqara (2), 62 and Sūrat al-Māʾida (5), 69: "Those who Believe, and Jews, and Sabians, and Christians—those who Believe in God and the Last Day and who act righteously—upon them shall be no fear, nor shall they be saddened." The crucial factor in attaining salvation, according to these verses, is not one's membership in a particular monotheist confession, but rather one's Belief in God and the Last Day, and one's pious behavior. Although the opening list of groups ("Those who Believe, and Jews, and Sabians, and Christians . . .")[1] may suggest that Believers have a separate identity categorically parallel to, but distinct from Jews, Sabians, and Christians, the verse later makes it clear that those Jews, Sabians, and Christians *who Believe in God and the Last Day and who act righteously* are, like those Christians *who Believe in God and the Last Day and who act righteously* are, like those simply called "Believers," promised salvation. That is, "Belief," which secures salvation, is actually a category that transcends the communal distinctions between Jew, Sabian, Christian, etc. By implication, then, it is clear that *some* Jews and *some* Christians are, or can be, Believers.

Many other passages—indeed, most Qur'anic passages that refer to *ahl al-kitāb* in general or some group of them in particular—appear to confirm this conclusion.[2] The most uncomplicated example is, perhaps, Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3), 199: "There are some *ahl al-kitāb* who believe in God and what was sent down to you and what was sent down to them . . ." More complex is the passage in Sūrat al-Baqara (2), 135-137, which emphasizes how Belief transcends confessional identity: "[135] They say, 'Be Jews' or '[Be] Christians, you shall be guided [to salvation].' Say [in response]: 'Rather, [we would be] the confession (*milla*) of Abraham as a *ḥanīf*; he was not one of the *mushrikīn*. [136] Say: We believe in God and what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (*al-asbāṭ*), and what was brought to Moses and Jesus, and what was brought to the prophets from their Lord. We do not differentiate

1. And similar lists, e.g. Sūrat al-Hajj (22), 17 ("True Believers, Jews, Sabaeans, Christians, Magians, and pagans" will all be judged by God on Judgment Day).

2. Some of them confirming it in the negative, e.g. Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3), 115 ("Those of the *ahl al-kitāb* who disbelieve . . ."), suggesting that there are others who can be considered Believers.

(*lā nufarriqu*) between any one of them; as we have submitted to Him (*wa naḥnu lahu muslimūn*). [137] So, if they Believed in that in which you have Believed, they have been indeed guided; but if they turn away, they are only in disagreement . . ." Or, in similar vein, Sūrat al-Baqara (2), 111-112: "[111] And they [Jews and Christians] said, 'Only he who is a Jew or a Christian will enter Paradise' . . ." [112] Rather, he who submits himself to God (*man aslama wajhahu lillāh*) and is virtuous (*muḥsin*) has his reward with his Lord; there shall be no fear upon them, nor shall they be saddened."

The central idea is that proper piety, avoidance of sinful behavior, is what saves, alongside a basic abstract belief in one God and the Last Day; indeed, it has been pointed out that in Qur'anic usage, proper Belief is actually tantamount to pious behavior, that the Qur'an, "in addressing those who believe was exhorting them to act in a certain manner, . . rather than to 'possess' a certain abstract substance (to 'have' faith)."[1] This being the case, it is virtually immaterial[2] to which monotheist community (*milla*) one belongs, for Belief—particularly in the sense of right or righteous action—transcends one's identification with a particular community. Those who Believe and are righteous are to be saved, whatever community they belong to; those who are sinful, on the other hand, will be punished.

Consider, for example, Sūrat al-Māʾida (5), 65: "If the *ahl al-kitāb* Believe and are pious (*ittaqaw*), We shall efface their evil deeds from them (*la-kaffarā 'anhum sayyi'ātihim*) and shall admit them to the gardens of delight. [66] If they obey the Torah and the Gospel and that which was sent down to them from their Lord, they shall eat from above, and from beneath their feet. Among them is a provident/moderate community (*ummatun muqtaṣidatun*), but many of them do evil."[3] This passage implies very strongly

1. Sheila McDonough, "Iman and Islam in the Qur'an," *Iqbal Review* 12/2 (April, 1971), 81-88; quote from p. 81. McDonough discusses a bit further on the importance of expecting the Last Day. [I was unable to read the end of this article because the last four pages had been vandalized in the library copy readily available to me.]
2. I say "virtually" here because there are some theological doctrines of particular monotheist confessions (e.g., belief in Jesus as son of God among Christians) that Believers considered to be *shirk*. This issue will be discussed at the end of this section of the paper.
3. See also Sūrat al-Māʾida (5), 58, which also makes clear to the *ahl al-kitāb* the importance of observing the Torah and Gospel.

that those individuals among the *ahl al-kitāb* who embrace right Belief and right action will be welcomed among the Believers.

Conversely, those *ahl al-kitāb* who do *not* believe, those among the "many of them [who] do evil," are not only excluded from the ranks of Believers, they are to be actively combatted. In the words of Sūrat al-Tawba (9), 29: "Of those who were brought the Book, fight such as do not believe in God and the last day, and who do not forbid what God and His apostle have forbidden, and who do not obey the true *dīn*, until, being completely subdued, they pay tribute from their hand."[1] Such members of the *ahl al-kitāb* who do not believe are even, at times, equated with unbelievers (*kāfirūn*), as in Sūrat al-Nisā' (4), 160: "Because of oppression [*zulm*] on the part of the Jews, We forbade them [some] good things that had been permitted to them— and because of their frequent hindering [of others] from the way of God, [161] and their taking of usury even after they were forbidden it, and their consuming the wealth of people falsely. For the unbelievers [*kāfirīn*] among them, we have prepared a painful punishment. [162] But for those of them who are grounded in knowledge, and the Believers who believe in what was sent down to you and what was sent down before you and those who observe prayer and those who bring alms and what and the Last Day—those We shall bring a great reward." Like many others, this passage makes it clear that the borderline dividing Believers/saved from unbelievers/damned is one that falls across the ranks of the *ahl al-kitāb*. People are to be saved not because of their confessional identity, but because, whatever their confessional identity, they are Believers, in word and deed.

Sūrat al-Naḥl (16), 114-118 strongly implies that Jews, or at least some Jews, were to be reckoned members of the community. In verses 114-117, God addresses the Prophet and the Believers, instructing them on dietary regulations, after which the subject shifts abruptly to the Jews in verse 118: "[114] Eat of the things which God has granted you as good and lawful, and give thanks for God's blessings, if it is He you serve. [115] He has

1. Noth, "Wer gibt die *gizya* in Sure 9:29" concludes that this verse urges the Believers not to fight the "good" *ahl al-kitāb* or to require them to pay *jizya*; such measures are reserved for the "bad" *ahl al-kitāb*. On this verse, see also the valuable observations of Uri Rubin, "Qur'an and Tafsir: The Case of '*an yadin*'," *Der Islam* 70 (1993), 133-44.

forbidden you carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and whatever is offered up [in sacrifice] to [a deity] other than God . . . [116] And do not let your tongues utter the lie,[1] "This is lawful" and "This is forbidden," making lies against God. Indeed, those who invent lies against God will not thrive. [117] [They shall gain] Small pleasure[s], but for them a grievous punishment. [118] And to the Jews We forbade that which We have related to you beforehand; We did not oppress them, rather they oppressed themselves." The sudden reference to the Jews in verse 118, in context of the verses preceding it, is inexplicable unless we assume that Jews were seen as an integral part of Muhammad's community for which these laws are being established.

This passage raises another interesting aspect of the question of how the early community of Believers was defined. As noted above, the Believers were those who believed in God and the Last Day, and who lived in righteousness or piety. Sūrat al-Naḥl (16), 114-118 (quoted in the preceding paragraph), and others like it, suggest that this piety or righteousness was not something vaguely defined, but was rather a way of life specifically in accordance with God's revealed Law. Unbelievers, in other words, are those who do not live by, or judge actions according to, God's revelation, whereas Believers are those who live according to the revealed Law and are judged by it.[2] Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 41-43 makes it clear that Muhammad was to be the arbiter among members of a community that included, among others, some Jews: "[41] O Apostle, do not grieve over those who hasten in unbelief, among those who said, 'We Believe' with their mouths, but whose hearts did not Believe; and among those who became Jews [ḥādū], listening to the lie [al-kadhib], listening to another group [qawm ākharīn] who did not come to you, twisting the words from their place, saying, 'If this was brought to you, accept it; if it was not brought, beware! . . .' [42] They listen to the lie, devouring illegal profits [akkalūn lil-

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1. The Arabic is awkward to translate; literally, it reads "Do not say that which your tongues describe, [namely] the lie, . . ." The point is that one should not forbid what God has permitted, or permit what God has forbidden. For a discussion of the syntax and parallel passages, see Rudi Paret, *Der Koran* (2nd ed, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1977), 294.
2. Cf. Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 44, which speaks of Torah, concluding with "whosoever does not make judgments (*man lam yaḥkum*) by that which God has sent down, they are the unbelievers." This is followed in verse 45 by a short reference to laws of retaliations, reminiscent of Exodus, and then in verses 46-47 by a mention of the Gospel, concluding with "whosoever does not make judgments by that which God has sent down, they are the dissolutes (*al-fāsiqūn*)." Finally, in Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 48-50, Muhammad is instructed to make judgments according to what God has revealed.

suḥt]. So if they come to you, judge between them or shun them. If you shun them, they will not harm you; but if you pass judgment among them, do so with equity [qisṭ], verily God loves those who are equitable. [43] But how will they ask you to judge them, when they have the Torah, in which is the judgment [ḥukm] of God? They will, then, turn away after that; those are not Believers." This passage is rather pessimistic about the probability that some Jews and others who have "hastened in unbelief" will remain within the community of Believers; why, it states, should those Jews who have violated God's law as given them in the Torah be any more receptive to God's law as revealed to Muhammad? But, in the present context the importance of these verses is threefold: (1) they make clear that some Jews, and even some people who were or were expected to be sinful, were seen as an integral part of the community of Believers; (2) they imply that the community of Believers consisted of those who were expected to live by the divine Law and thus subject to Muhammad's authority as judge or arbiter; and (3) they make it clear that the principles according to which Muhammad is to judge disputes and according to which the life of his community is to be regulated are the Laws sent down to him in the Qur'an—which are the same as those Laws revealed beforehand to earlier *ahl al-kitāb*, such as the Jews.

The Qur'an even seems to provide, in verses 5: 51-66, a brief history of the relations between Muhammad's community of Believers and the *ahl al-kitāb*. Qur'an 5:61 seems to recall an early stage, when the *ahl al-kitāb* came to join the Believers, followed by a stage of disillusionment with them: "When they [*ahl al-kitāb*] came to you, they said, 'We Believe,' yet [in fact] they came in unbelief [*kufr*] and they went out in it. But, God was most aware of what they were hiding." It is not clear whether, in the initial phase, all the *ahl al-kitāb* were included among the Believers, or only some of them—the pious, for example.[1] But it is clearly stated that the *ahl al-kitāb* "came to" Muhammad professing to be Believers. The Believers were doubtless eager to welcome these new supporters. Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 52 suggests that the Believers were sometimes overzealous in their desire to win over the *ahl al-kitāb*: "You see those [Believers] with sickness in their hearts hastening to them [*ahl al-kitāb*], saying 'We are afraid that a change of fortune shall befall

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1. Although we might note here that Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 41-43, quoted above, suggests that Muhammad's community surely included some sinful *ahl al-kitāb*.

us . . . ." The implication is that some Believers, in their desire to win *ahl al-kitāb* to their own community, were willing to make undefined concessions to them. However, verse 53 confirms that many, at least, of the *ahl al-kitāb* who had first professed Belief later could no longer be counted among the Believers: "Those who Believe will say, 'Are these the ones who swore to God a solemn oath that they were surely with you? Their deeds were useless and they became the losers." Some of the *deeds* that seem to have been the crucial factor leading to the exclusion of these *ahl al-kitāb* from the community of Believers are also described in this passage. Verses 62-63 relate, "You see many of them competing with each other in sinfulness and transgression, and their consuming forbidden wealth. How evil is that which they have done! [63] Why do the rabbis and the *ahbār* not prevent them from their uttering sinfulness and their consuming forbidden wealth? How evil is that which they have put down! (*bi'sa mā yada'ūna!*) "It was not only their perceived infractions of the Law that put some *ahl al-kitāb* outside the community of Believers, however; they also engaged in ridiculing the Believers, as stated in Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 57: "Believers, do not take as intimates (*awliyā'*) those sent the Book before you who took your law (*dīn*)[1] for a thing of joking and mockery, nor unbelievers (*kuffār*); but fear God, if you would be Believers." In the last verse quoted it is very important to note, however, that only those *ahl al-kitāb* who engaged in such ridicule are singled out for censure. Presumably, the implication of the verse is that Believers were free to establish close relations with those *ahl al-kitāb* who did not ridicule or mock the Believers.[2]

III

Although the Qur'anic passages examined in the preceding section seem to permit the inclusion of Jews and Christians among the Believers, the Qur'an is somewhat contradictory in its attitude toward the *ahl al-kitāb*.[3] There remain roughly a half-dozen Qur'anic passages that appear to contradict the hypothesis advanced here; we must now turn to these, to see if they can be reconciled with it. Let us begin with Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 51, which states flatly,

1. Here the meaning "religion" or "obedience" also fits well for *dīn*.

2. See above, at note 24.

3. Tilman Nagel, "Muhammads Haltung zu den anderen Religionen," *Theologische Quartalschrift* 161 (1981), 199, notes the contradictory character of the Qur'an's references to *ahl al-kitāb*.

"O you who Believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as companions [*awliyā'*]; they are companions of one another. Whosoever of you takes them as companions, he is truly one of them. Verily, God does not guide unjust peoples [*al-qawm al-ẓālimīn*]." Read in isolation, this verse suggests that Jews and Christians could not also be numbered among the Believers, as it seems to establish a sharp division between the two. If we do not read the verse in isolation, however, but rather see it in the context of the passages examined earlier—particularly Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 57, which uses almost exactly the same wording as verse 51, but limits the ban on intimacy with Jews and Christians to those guilty of mocking the Believers—we are entitled to ask whether verse 51 may not also have been intended to refer only to those Jews and Christians who actively opposed the Believers, even though the crucial limitation is not stated. The argument that the limitation has been left out is admittedly not elegant, but given the virtually identical phrasing and close juxtaposition of verses 51 and 57, it is perhaps not unwarranted.

Some other Qur'anic passages (Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), verses 17, 72, and 73; Sūrat al-Tawba (9), 30-31; Sūrat Maryam (19), verses 35 and 91-92; Sūrat al-Ikhlās (112), 3)[1] seem to pose even more serious problems for our hypothesis. In each case, the Qur'an attacks the concept of the Trinity or related ideas: "Those who say, 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary' disbelieve . . ." (Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 17; Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5), 72). Similarly, Sūrat al-Ikhlās (112), 3: "[Allāh] begets not, nor is he begotten . . ." Sūrat al-Tawba (9), 30-31 speaks of both Jews and Christians: "The Jews have said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians have said, 'The Messiah is the son of God.' That is what they utter with their mouths, resembling the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God fight them! How have they been deceived? [*annā yu'fakūn*] [31] They take their learned men and their monks as lords to the exclusion of God [*min dūni llāh*], and the Messiah, son of Mary [likewise], even though they were ordered to worship one God; there is no God but Him . . ."

The content of these passages cannot, obviously, be harmonized theologically with the

1. Some other verses also address this topic, but in less clearly critical a manner; e.g., Sūrat al-Baqara (2), 116: "They say, 'God has taken a son.' Glory be to Him! Rather, everything that is in the heavens and the earth is His; all obey Him [*kullun lahu qānitūn*]."

Trinitarian dogmas of Christianity. Some passages, however, hint that Christians may have been seen as suitable for "rehabilitation" and inclusion among the Believers, even though the trinitarian doctrine of Christianity was not acceptable to the Qur'an. Sūrat al-Nisā' (4), 171, for example, seems to suggest that Christians should mend their ways by not speaking of God as triune, but addresses them as though they were still to be considered part of the community—certainly not enemies: "O people of the Book, do not exceed proper bounds in *dīn*; and speak only the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, [was only] the Apostle of God and His Word which He cast to Mary, a spirit from Him. So Believe in God and His Apostles, and do not say "Three"; leave off [doing so], it will be better for you . . ."

There is, however, another factor to be considered in dealing with such passages, which seem to contradict our hypothesis that the first community of Believers was a non-confessional monotheism that included some Christians and Jews. We must remind ourselves that the passages in question deal with *theological* issues, whereas the question of whether the community of Believers originally included some Jews or Christians is a question of *social and communal organization*.

The organization and delimitation of a community is, of course, related to the ideology espoused by the group; that is why, when the theological implications of the Qur'an were worked out systematically, it became necessary to exclude Christians (and Jews) *as such* from the ranks of Believers. In other words, it was precisely the *theological* implications of such passages as these in the Qur'an text that made inevitable the eventual crystallization of Muslims as a religious confession distinct from other monotheisms. But, it seems possible to suppose that these particular Qur'anic passages were, at first, not widely known among the Believers, and almost certain that the theological implications of them were not at the outset consistently worked out. For one thing, according to Muslim tradition itself, the text of the Qur'an was not codified as a distinct text—a vulgate—until the work of Zayd b. Thābit and his team of editors compiled it from scattered manuscripts and recitations, sometime during the caliphate of 'Uthmān (r. 644-656 C.E.)—that is, between twelve and twenty-four years after Muhammad's death, and after the first wave of conquests had taken possession of Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and western Iran. It has been suggested that most early

Muslims actually knew very little of the Qur'an, since it was not yet available to them as a fixed text.[1] Moreover, the crucial passages are few in number and quite short, and form only a small proportion of the Qur'an. Further, although they deal with one of the key *theological* issues of the Qur'an—God's unity—these passages on the Trinity are clearly a secondary theme in Qur'anic discourse, far less central to the Qur'anic message than such key themes as warnings and descriptions of the Last Day, celebration of God's role as Creator, injunctions to pious behavior, or the examples of earlier apostles and the peoples to whom they were sent.

In this context we should recall that new social movements or communities crystallizing around a group of central, charismatic ideas very commonly display contradictions between the social implications of these ideas and the social realities of the movement or community. The American Declaration of Independence of 1776 declared clearly in its opening phrases that "all men are created equal," a concise expression of the anti-royalist temper of the American revolution; yet the fact that this phrase was adopted as one of the leading principles of the new republic did not lead Americans to reject chattel slavery, even in legal terms, until more than a half-century later. Presumably, if one had asked many nineteenth-century American slaveholders about the phrase "all men are created equal," they would have responded with something like, "Yes, but Negroes?"

1. Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: the View from the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 40-42, 50-52, describes the process of conversion to Islam in the period in a way that underlines the limited information available to new converts on what Islam actually was. See also G.H.A. Juynboll, "On the Origins of Arabic Prose," in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), 161-175, at page 163. A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire* (2nd ed., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 208, states that the "majority of the fighting Arabs consisted of Bedouins who knew of Islam only by hearsay." He also notes the "indulgent attitude of early Islam toward Christianity and Judaism . . ." (I thank Dr. W. Harold Mare for this reference.) Vasiliev's concern, however, is to show that the early Believers were not motivated by religious zeal, but rather by material incentives, and he recites the old theory that the invasions were caused by the inability of Arabia to support its population. See my critique of these theories in *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 3-9, and "Centralized Authority and Military Autonomy in the Early Islamic Conquests," in Averil Cameron and Lawrence I. Conrad (eds.), *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East, 3. States, Resources and Armies* [Papers presented at the third workshop of the Late Antiquity and Early Islam project, October, 1992] (Princeton: Darwin Press, forthcoming). *Pace* Vasiliev, my own reading of the evidence leads me to conclude that the early Believers were *primarily* motivated by religious zeal, albeit of a non-confessional kind.

That phrase wasn't intended to apply to *them*." And, of course, even after Abolition, African-Americans continued to be denied, by law, equality in areas such as voting rights and public education (until at least the 1960s), as well as, through common prejudice, access to housing and employment (still a problem today). In short, some of the most basic social and legal implications of the central phrase "all men are created equal" were not realized for generations, yet millions of Americans lived comfortably with these sharp contradictions between their espoused ideals, which they celebrated loudly on national holidays, and the social and communal realities in which they lived.

It is, therefore, not entirely capricious to suggest that for the first few decades of the Islamic era, the Believers may have been quite ready to accept among their number those Christians and Jews who shared their zeal to spread the message of God and the Last Day, and who agreed to live piously by the law, even though the theological implications of some passages in the Qur'an would eventually exclude the *ahl al-kitāb* from the ranks of Believers. This is all the more likely considering that many Believers may have been only dimly aware, or totally unaware, of the Qur'anic passages in question. It may have been several decades before these Qur'anic passages became even known among Believers generally, and several decades more before the full implications of the Qur'an's theological stand for communal self-definition became clear to Believers. Until this had happened, however, some Christians and Jews—those who shared the Believers' insistence on the omnipotence and omnipresence of the one God, the imminence of the Last Day, and the need to lead a life of strenuous piety according to the revealed Law—may have remained part of the community of Believers, particularly within the "colonies" of Believers that were established (initially as garrisons) in newly-subdued provinces of what was becoming a growing empire.

IV.

In the preceding two sections, we have seen how various Qur'anic passages *may be construed to permit* the membership of *ahl al-kitāb* among the initial community of Believers, or even to imply that some *ahl al-kitāb* were numbered among the Believers. In this section, we shall examine further evidence that the early community of Believers in

Yathrib included at least some *ahl al-kitāb*, in particular, some Jews.[1]

Among extra-Qur'anic sources for Muhammad's community, one stands out especially: the text usually known to Western scholarship as the "Constitution of Medina" (also variously referred to as the "Umma Document," "Kitāb Madīna," or "The Ṣaḥīfa Document").[2] This appears to be the transcript of a set of documents setting down agreements reached between Muhammad and the people of Yathrib sometime after the *hijra*. Although the original of this document or set of documents has not survived, three versions have survived in various literary texts. These transcripts are so strikingly archaic in expression, and so unaccommodating in content to later dogmas of the classical Islamic tradition, that their authenticity has been accepted by virtually all scholars—even by those quite skeptically inclined toward the historicity of the Arabic-Islamic literary tradition when it comes to the origins of Islam. It thus makes sense to look first, and especially carefully, at what the Constitution of Medina can tell us about relations between Believers

1 Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 7, note that "the Jews appear in . . . the 'Constitution of Medina' as forming one community (*umma*) with the believers despite the retention of their religion." The question of whether, beside Jews, Christians or other monotheists belonged to Muhammad's community, or had contact with Muhammad, is not answered as clearly by traditional sources. However, we may note here that some accounts of the delegations that came to Muhammad mention Christians. The delegation from the tribe of 'Abd al-Qays was apparently headed by a Christian, and the Banū Ḥanīfa had a monk (*rāhib*) and a church (*bī'a*), which the Ḥanīfa delegation was asked by Muhammad to destroy when they returned, and to build a *masjid* in its place. See al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk* (ed. M. J. de Goeje et al, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901) i/1736-38; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr* 1, part 2 (ed. E. Sachau and E. Mitwoch, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1917), 54-56.

2 The literature on the Constitution is extensive. Note the following: R. Stephen Humphreys, "The Constitution of Medina," in his *Islamic History: A Framework for Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 92-98; Uri Rubin, "The Constitution of Medina. Some Notes," *Studia Islamica* 62 (1985), 5-23 comes closest to the ideas presented here; Akira Goto, "The Constitution of Medina," *Orient* (Tokyo) 18 (1982), 1-16; R. B. Serjeant, "The *Sunnah Jāmi'ah*, Pacts with the Yathrib Jews, and the *Tahrīm* of Yathrib: Analysis and Translation of the Documents comprised in the So-Called 'Constitution of Medina'," *BSOAS* 51 (1978), 1-42; Moshe Gil, "The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration," *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), 44-65; R. B. Serjeant, "The Constitution of Medina," *Islamic Quarterly* 8 (1964), 3-16; W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956), 221-260; A. J. Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina* [Dutch original *Mohammed en de Joden te Medina* (1908)] (Freiburg, 1975), 57-71; Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam* 1 (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1905), 391-408; Julius Wellhausen, "Muhammad's Constitution of Medina" [German original in his *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* IV (1889), 67-81] translated in Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews*, 128-138. In what follows, I cite the documents and clauses as reconstructed by Serjeant in *BSOAS*, but have modified his translation at various points where I deem it necessary.

and Jews (Christians and other monotheists are not mentioned in it) in Muhammad's community.

Several passages in the Constitution are very suggestive in view of the hypothesis being advanced in this paper, that the original community of Believers was not conceived as a religious confession distinct from those of other monotheists. In the first section of the Constitution (or first document, if one accepts that what we now have is a composite of several originally separate documents), we already find the Jews mentioned:

A8. Whosoever of Jews (Yahūd) follows us shall have support/what is customary, and parity, not undergoing injustice and no mutual support being given against them.

This paragraph, with its reference to "following us," echoes the terminology of the opening phrases of the Constitution:

A1. This is a writing from Muhammad the Prophet, God bless and honour him, between the Mu'minūn and Muslimūn of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them, and join with them, and strive along with them.

A2a. They are a single people (umma) set apart from [the rest of] mankind.[1]

The similarity of phrasing in paragraphs A1 and A8 makes it clear that the Jews, or at least those who "follow us," were at the outset part of the "single people" (umma)—that is, of Muhammad's community in Yathrib.[2]

The membership of Jews in the umma is stated even more clearly further along in the Constitution:

C2a. The Jews of Banū 'Awf are a people (umma)[3] with the

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1. Serjeant translates A2a as "They are a single confederation (ummah) set apart from the people." As Patricia Crone pointed out to me, however, umma does not mean "confederation" (personal communication, May 1994). In the Qur'an, umma appears to mean "race, people" (cf. Jeffery, Foreign Vocabulary, s.v.); another common translation, perhaps acceptable here, is "community."

2. The use of the terms mu'minūn and muslimūn in close sequence here has sometimes puzzled scholars who have considered the two terms virtually synonyms. As we have noted above, however, they cannot be synonyms. As used here, they apparently refer to two aspects or characteristics of those people in the community; they Believe, and they live by the law.

3. I have again changed Serjeant's "confederation" to "people." Later in this paragraph, I have put "law" for dīn, where Serjeant has "religion/law."

Mu'minūn,[1] the Jews having their law (dīn) and the Muslimūn[2] having their law. [This applies to] their clients (mawālī) and to themselves,[3] excepting anyone who acts wrongfully (ẓalama) and commits crime/acts treacherously/breaks an agreement, for he but slays himself and the people of his house.

From this passage it is patently obvious that at least some Jews were included in the umma. We also gain a hint about the nature of the relationship between the Jews and the Believers and/or Muslims, in that the Jews are said to have a separate dīn than the Believers/Muslims.

Gil's effort to interpret this passage as a reference to "debt" (reading the Arabic d.y.n as dayn, "debt," rather than dīn)[4] strikes me as forced. While it is true that the section to which this passage belongs (document C, in Serjeant's reconstruction) begins with a sentence about paying expenses of war, which might imply a financial context for the whole section, the second sentence, in which the word d.y.n itself occurs, does not refer to financial matters or obligations. Rather, the sentence begins by (re)affirming that the Jews of Banū 'Awf are one people with the Believers, and continues by saying, "excepting anyone who acts wrongfully (ẓalama) and commits crime/acts treacherously/breaks an agreement [[athima]] . . ." (Serjeant's translation, except for double brackets). "Acting wrongfully" and "acting sinfully" are used in the Qur'an particularly in moral contexts; iithm especially, in Qur'anic usage, refers to sin in general, also perhaps to disobedience to Muhammad in particular. In any case, the context in which these terms are used in the

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1. Rubin, following Abū 'Ubayd and Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Nihāya, corrects this to "a community of Believers" (reading min for Ibn Isḥāq's ma'a) — cf. Serjeant, variant 40. His reasons, in particular the Qur'anic parallels in phraseology, seem persuasive. But see note 45, which suggests caution in adopting Abū 'Ubayd's readings.

2. Abū 'Ubayd's version has Mu'minūn in line 2 of clause C2a; other versions have Muslimūn. Abū 'Ubayd's version therefore seems to be the redacted one [see also the comments on paragraph F4 of the Constitution, below]. Serjeant has noted (p. 9) that Abū 'Ubayd's version in general appears to be less reliable than Ibn Isḥāq's version, and unlike it does not go back to a written copy. It is worth noting that changing muslimūn to mu'minūn, and changing ma'a "with" to min "of" (see the previous note), would imply that Jews are not part of the same umma as the other Believers.

3. Here Serjeant has ". . . their clients and their persons . . ." in unbroken continuation of the preceding sentence, which I find opaque.

4. Moshe Gil, "The Constitution of Medina: A Reconsideration," Israel Oriental Studies 4 (1974), 44-65.

Qur'an involves not financial indebtedness, but rather notions of religious infraction and communal disobedience. The use of these terms in Document C of the Constitution of Medina suggests that the context here, too, was that of moral and communal duty and obedience, a context for which it seems more logical to read d.y.n as dīn, "law."[1] Finally, there is also the fact that, if d.y.n were to be read as dayn, "debt," we would expect it to be used with the preposition 'alā, not the preposition li- that we find in the text.[2]

Document C may reflect a time when the Jews of B. 'Awf, etc. had just joined the umma. In this case, C1 can be understood to say that [these] Jews [like other Jews already in the community, as implied in A] will, like other Believers, pay expenses of war along with the [rest of the, long-standing] Believers. This terminology is repeated in Document E, which further discusses the relations between Jews, Muslims, and Believers, particularly their payments of expenses (nafaqa):

E3a. The Jews will pay nafaqah (yunfiqūna) along with the Mu'minūn while they continue at war.

E3b. The Jews are responsible (for paying) their nafaqa, and the Muslimūn are responsible (for paying) their nafaqa.

E4. There is support between them against anyone who goes to war with the people of this sheet. (wa-inna baynahum al-naṣra 'alā man ḥāraba ahla ḥādhihi al-ṣaḥīfa.)

One may, of course, assume that paragraphs E3a and E3b are more or less repetitions of one another, and that the terms mu'minīn in E3a and muslimīn in E3b refer to essentially the same people. But if we assume—as I think we must—that

1. It is worth noting that Gil's reading of d.y.n as dayn/debt is not unrelated to his broader interpretation, which sees the whole document as "[having] in view the expulsion of the Medinan Jews even at the moment of its writing" [p. 65]. He argues that the passage cited here is part of the process by which the Jews were deprived of their "economic independence" [p. 64], since "the Muslims are [now] responsible for the debts of their Jewish clients." [p. 63]. Gil's broader argument strikes me as specious; there is nothing in the Constitution of Medina that suggests an inferiority in the Jews' position in the umma, particularly if one does not insist (as Gil does) in seeing "Jews" and "Believers" or "Muslims" as exclusive categories. Goto, 12, also understands dīn as "religion." Rubin seems to cling to a presumed confessional distinction between the Jews and the Believers.

2. I am grateful to Mr. Ihab Hamdi Sakkut for pointing this out to me during the workshop; it is also noted by Rubin, 16, note 44.

Believers and Muslims are not coterminous groups, we might interpret these two paragraphs in the following manner: E3a informs us that the Jews will pay their share of war costs along with the Believers—that is, along with the other Believers, the Jews (that is, the Jews of the umma—those "who follow us") being considered among the Believers; while E3b refines this, telling us, implicitly, that two subgroups make up the Believers—the Jews and the Muslims—and that each subgroup will be responsible for its share of the costs. The term muslimūn here may then mean those who obey Qur'anic law; the Jews, on the other hand, are allowed to follow their own law, i.e. the Torah, as suggested in C2a, and hence are identified as Jews, (even though they could, if our understanding is correct, also have been considered muslimūn, in that they were observant of God's law). Perhaps we can understand the Jews and Muslims of Yathrib as forming two congregations, both considered Believers and both within the umma, but each congregation following its own form of the law (perhaps especially in matters of ritual?) and each responsible for gathering its own share of contributions to the war expenses (nafaqa) of the unified umma, as a practical administrative arrangement.

A few other passages in the Constitution of Medina also state that the Jews belonged to the umma:

D2. Those associated with Jews (by alliance and bonds of mutual protection) are as themselves.[1]

G6. The Jews of the Aws, their clients and themselves, are on the same (basis) as the people of this sheet, with sincere/complete observation (i.e. of its stipulations) on the part of the people of this sheet.

The Constitution of Medina thus suggests that the Jews of Yathrib, at least those who were inclined to support Muhammad, were part of the umma. It is true that the Constitution never states explicitly that these Jews are Believers, but it also never states explicitly that the Aws or many other groups mentioned in the document are Believers; moreover, as we have seen, the Qur'an itself considers some ahl al-kitāb to be Believers. There seems, then, every reason to conclude that the Jews of Yathrib who worked with

1. wa-inna bijānat Yahūd ka-anfusihim.

the Believers were full members of the community of Believers in every sense, that, in short, they were considered Believers. Rubin has shown that the phrase *umma wāḥida* in the Qur'an means a people united by a common religious orientation.[1] Like Watt, Rubin chooses to see this as Muhammad's "concession" to the Jews of Yathrib, in hope of winning them over later to his own "religion," i.e., Islam; but this view is based upon the assumption that *dīn* in the Constitution of Medina must mean "religion" and its corollary, that Believers/Muslims must therefore be distinct from the Jews in religion—even though his own analysis of the term *umma wāḥida* had led him to conclude that they were united in religion. If we take the additional step of accepting that the Jews (or, at least, some Jews) formed an integral part of the community of Believers in Yathrib, however, these contradictions in the material evaporate.

V.

The question of what Muhammad's role in the early community of Believers was taken to be is similarly complicated. We must consider, first, what the early Believers themselves understood his position to be—in particular, what his claim to be prophet or apostle meant to them. Second, we must consider how contemporary Jews or Christians might have understood Muhammad's role—a subject that forces us to think not only about the actual nature of his role, but also about how well that role was known to those outside the community. Above all, we will need to examine whether (or, more precisely, when) the perception of Muhammad's role would have prevented Christians or Jews from seeing themselves, or being seen, as part of the community of Believers.

In addressing the early Believers' perception of Muhammad's status, we must begin—once again—with the Qur'an. Muhammad is called both messenger or apostle (*rasūl*) and prophet (*nabī*) in the Qur'an, but there is significant disagreement among modern scholars over the exact meaning of these terms in Qur'anic usage.[2] Matters are not made easier by

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1. Rubin, 13.
2. On the meaning of *nabī* (prophet) and *rasūl* (apostle) in the Qur'an, see especially Willem Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and more than a Prophet?," *The Muslim World* 59 (1969), 1-28, which refers to the extensive earlier Western literature on this topic. See also Alford T. Welch, "Muhammad's Understanding of Himself: The Koranic Data," in Richard G. Hovhannisian and Speros Vryonis, Jr., *Islam's Understanding*

the fact that later Muslim tradition tended to blur the distinction between *rasūl* and *nabī*, particularly when speaking of Muhammad.[1]

Nor is it clear how the early Believers understood these terms; to approach this issue, we need to survey briefly how current the notion of prophecy may have been in the Near East on the eve of Islam, and just how it was defined. In rabbinic Jewish circles, prophecy was considered to have ceased in antiquity, a view that was at least in part a reaction by the rabbis to the rise of Christianity and hence is datable to the first century C.E.[2] Among non-rabbinic Jews and early Christians, on the other hand, several different forms of prophecy were considered still to be very much alive, at least into the second century C.E., if not later. The notion of prophecy in early Christianity could refer to a wide variety of activities, from the revelation of sacred scripture to undertakings as unremarkable as inspired interpretation of the scripture, and including such diverse acts as warning of the impending end of the world, reading omens, and pious preaching to be righteous.[3] To call someone a prophet, in such a context, did not necessarily imply that

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of Itself (Malibu: Undena, 1983), 15-52, esp. 41-47; Toshihiko Izutzu, *God and Man in the Koran* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1969; reprinted New York: Arno, 1980), 178-79, 181-83; Ahrens, *Muhammad als Religionsstifter*, 127-32 and 154-60; Widengren, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension*, 7-24; Arthur Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture* (New York: Russell F. Moore Co., 1952), esp. 18-46; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda: The Oriental Institute, 1938; reprinted Lahore, 1977), 276-77 on *nabī*; A. J. Wensinck, "Muhammed und die Propheten," *Acta Orientalia* 2 (1924), 168-198; Leone Caetani, *Annali dell'Islam* I (Milan: U. Hoepli, 1905), 192-215; Otto Pautz, *Muhammed's Lehre von der Offenbarung quellenmässig untersucht* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1898), 220-264. There is significant disagreement among these scholars on the exact import of the terms *nabī* and *rasūl* in Qur'anic usage.

1. Wensinck, 171, points out that the *hadīth* literature does not distinguish clearly between *nabī* and *rasūl* as applied to Muhammad. Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture*, 27-28, argues exactly the reverse—that the Qur'an knows no such distinction, but that it is introduced in later Islamic tradition. Bijlefeld re-analyzes the material and finally comes down on Wensinck's side on this issue.

2. See Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous: Aspects of Ahmadi Religious Thought and its Medieval Background* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 68, citing E.E. Urbach, "Matay pasqah ha-nevu'ah?," ("When did prophecy cease?"), *Tarbiz* 17 (1946-47), 1-11 (in Hebrew). I thank Dr. Maribel Fierro for bringing this work to my attention.

3. An excellent survey of prophecy in early Christianity and its antecedents in Judaism and antique paganism is David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1983).

they had great supernatural powers or had had intimate contact with the divine. The prevalence and meaning of the concepts of prophecy and apostleship in the Near East from the third to seventh centuries are apparently subjects that have received little study, so we can, at present, do little more than guess what concepts of prophecy and apostleship existed in western Arabia in the early seventh century C.E., or how widespread they were.[1] It is worth recalling, however, that raising the claim to prophecy seems to have been in vogue in Arabia around Muhammad's time, since Muslim tradition itself describes several other figures besides Muhammad who made this claim for themselves. These figures (not all of them men) are, naturally, considered by Muslim tradition to have been "false prophets."[2]

The fact that several people laid claim to prophecy in seventh-century Arabia suggests that some concept of prophecy was fairly current there at that time. It does not, however, tell us just how the early Believers would have understood the Qur'anic passages that describe Muhammad as prophet or apostle. Moreover, Muhammad is also called other things in the Qur'an: "warner" (nadhīr), "harbinger" or "herald" (bashīr) etc.,[3] terms which do not so obviously carry the same burden of portentous theological implications that the terms prophet and apostle sometimes did. Furthermore, the Qur'an does not portray Muhammad as *better* than other prophets,[4] merely as another in a long

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1. The only significant exception, I believe, is the literature on Mani and Manichaeanism, but this contains surprisingly little on Mani's conception of prophecy. Within the literature on early Islam, Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture*, makes the most extensive effort to deal with the meaning of "apostleship," but he relies heavily on a combination of Qur'anic and Old Testament material, which may not provide the most illuminating points of comparison; in any case, his analysis of the characteristic features of prophecy is fairly rudimentary when compared, for example, to that of Aune and the many studies on which Aune draws.

2. Considered by Muslim tradition, of course, as "false prophets." On these figures and the wars of the *ridda* or apostasy, during which the new state in Medina suppressed them, see Elias S. Shoufani, *al-Riddah and the Muslim Conquest of Arabia* (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972); Geo Widengren, *Muhammad, The Apostle of God, and His Ascension* (Uppsala and Wiesbaden, 1955), esp. 7-24.

3. Jeffery, *Qur'an as Scripture*, 35, who understands these terms as references to functional attributes of prophecy; Welch, 45-46.

4. Friedmann, 51-52, discusses the Qur'anic verses implying differences in rank among the prophets, and those implying that they were of equal status. Both these attitudes show up also in *hadīth*: e.g. Abū Dā'ud, *Sunan* 4, 217 (no. 4668): "Do not choose favorites among the prophets" [*lā tukhayyirū bayna al-anbiyā'*]; for the opposite sentiment, see no. 4673.

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line; the famous phrase that Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets" (*khatam al-nabiyyīn*, Sūrat al-Aḥzāb (33), 40) probably only came to be understood as meaning "last, culmination, perfection of the series" at a later date in the Islamic era.[1] There is even some evidence to suggest that some among the early Believers may have believed in the possibility of prophets after Muhammad; note the *hadith* stating that if Muhammad's son Ibrāhīm had lived to maturity, he would have been a righteous man and a prophet (*la-kāna ṣiddīqan nabiyyan*),[2] and the apocalyptic traditions from the early Islamic period in which the rebel al-Mukhtār is said to be "as much a prophet as Muhammad."[3] The survival of concepts of "living" apostleship or prophecy among certain Shi'ite sects is, of course, well known.[4]

How, then, did the early Believers understand Muhammad's role as prophet and apostle? Did they take at least the Qur'anic references to Muhammad as prophet to mean merely that he was an inspired, righteous teacher? Or did they have some sense of the weightier implications of the terms *nabī* and, particularly, *rasūl* as used in some Jewish and Christian circles?

Whatever the early Believers' theological understanding of Muhammad's role as apostle and prophet, there is only limited Qur'anic evidence to suggest that the early Believers were expected to place much emphasis on Muhammad's prophetic status. Some Qur'anic verses do describe Muhammad as *nabī* or *rasūl*, but many others emphasize only belief in God and the Last Day, and the importance of living righteously, and make

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1. An excellent discussion of how the understanding of the term "seal of the prophets" evolved in Islamic tradition is found in Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, 53-82. Friedmann, 55, notes some variant traditions implying that the phrase "seal of the prophets" was originally construed to mean "the last of" in the sense of the one coming near the Day of Judgment: "This variant . . . is one of the numerous ways in which Muslim tradition reflects the Prophet's deep sense of the impending Day of Judgment." See also Wensinck, "Muhammed und die Propheten," 195.

2. Ibn Māja, *Sunan* (ed. Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, [Beirut]: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1395/1975) 1, p. 484, no. 1511. Cf. Friedmann, 56-60 on such accounts.

3. Lawrence I. Conrad (conference communication).

4. See, for example, the remarks on the beliefs of Abū al-Khaṭṭāb al-Asadī (d. 143) in al-Hasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-Shī'a* (ed. 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ḥifnī, Cairo: Dār al-Rashād, 1412/1992), 52. According to Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, there existed in every age *two* apostles, a *rasūl nāṭiq* and a *rasūl ṣāmit*.

no mention of the prophet.[1]

The limited non-Qur'anic evidence available also suggests that the main focus of early Believers' concern may not have been with Muhammad's status as messenger or prophet, but rather with the essentials of the message he brought—Belief in God and Last Day. That is, his role as the bearer of a divinely-inspired message may initially have been more or less taken for granted, so that the bulk of the Believers' attention was focused on the essentials of the message he preached, and most of their energy concentrated on realizing that message. The Constitution of Medina again provides us with some interesting early examples. Only one passage in the Constitution says anything directly about religious beliefs, and it mentions only God and the Last Day.[2]

> B3a. It is not lawful to (any) *Mu'min* who has affirmed what is on this sheet and/or believes[3] in God and the Last Day, to support or shelter an aggressor/innovator.

Note that the passage does not say something like "who believes in God, *His Prophet*, and the Last Day . . ." In two other passages, moreover, Muhammad is mentioned as head of the community and arbiter, and God's blessings are invoked on him, but no reference is made of his status as *rasūl* or *nabī*:

> B4. In whatever thing you are at variance, its reference back (*maradd*) is to God, Great and Glorious, and to Muhammad, God bless and honour him.

> D3. No one will come out from them, except by permission from Muhammad, God bless and honour him.

Of course, attentive readers of the Constitution will know that there are three places where it does refer to Muhammad as prophet or messenger (apostle)—two of them being the very first clause (A1) and the very last (H3), the third a passage in Document F referring to Muhammad's role as arbiter of disputes:

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1. E.g., Sūrat al-Baqara (2), 62; Sūrat al-Nisā' (4), 136. Welch, 38, notes that the emphasis on Muhammad's role as prophet, messenger, and the need to "believe in" and "obey" him only begins with the middle and later Medinese verses.
2. In the rest of this paragraph I use Serjeant's translations throughout, except as marked.
3. Serjeant translates *amana* as "trusts."

> A1. This is a writing from Muhammad the Prophet, God bless and honour him, between the *Mu'minīn* and the *Muslimīn* of Quraysh and Yathrib . . .

> F4. Whatsoever aggression . . . there is . . . , will be referred (*maradda-hu*) to God, Great and Glorious, and to Muhammad the Apostle of God, God bless and honour him.

> H3. God is a protector for him who observes undertakings and keeps free of dishonourable acts and offences, and Muhammad, God bless and honour him, is the Apostle of God.

Examination of the textual variants between different versions of the Constitution may enable us to explain—or, perhaps, explain away—these references.[1] In each of these three cases, the variants suggest strongly that the original reading of the text was simply "Muhammad" or "God and Muhammad," without *rasūl* or *nabī* and probably also without the honorifics ("Great and Glorious"/'*azza wa jalla* and "God bless and honour him"/*sl'm*).[2] Indeed, scrutiny of the textual variants also suggests that the honorifics in clauses B4 and D3, cited above, may also be later additions. (There is no hint in the variants, however, that the crucial clause B3a, also cited above, ever contained the name of Muhammad.) The tendency of later Muslims to interpolate into early texts references to Muhammad's prophetic status and pious honorifics that may not originally have been there is quite understandable, since those later Muslims lived in an age when Muhammad's status as prophet had become one of the decisive elements—and certainly the most prominent element—that established the confessional distinctness of Muslims from other monotheists. Such interpolations were probably, of course, entirely innocent—that is, not done intentionally to deceive later readers about the true state of affairs in the early community of Believers, but merely because later Muslim copyists simply took for granted that Muhammad's prophetic status was as important, an issue for the early Believers as it had become for them. Hence, they may have assumed that texts lacking the

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1. Serjeant conveniently tabulates the textual variants at the end of his article (pp. 40-42). The variants in question here are numbers 1, 61, and 70.
2. I apologize (but not very abjectly) for not taking readers on the long detour in textual comparison needed to demonstrate this clearly. I do hope to undertake this as a separate article, but at the moment will make no promises.

expected honorifics and expressions of Muhammad's prophetic status had simply lost them, and saw fit to "restore" what had, in their view, probably dropped out. In any case, as we have seen, the Constitution of Medina provides little reason to think that the early Believers placed special emphasis on Muhammad's status as prophet or messenger. If anything, it suggests that they emphasized his role as leader of the community and arbiter of disputes within it, rather than his role as prophet.

Even more compelling in this respect is the documentary evidence from the early Islamic period. Although such documentary evidence—coins, inscriptions, etc.—is very limited in quantity, it is striking that there is no documentary mention of Muhammad until the mid-60s A.H.[1] The earliest "Islamic" coins have brief legends in Arabic added to the older Sasanian or Byzantine styles, but at first Arabic coin legends are limited to names of governors or caliphs, indications (apparently) of quality or fineness (e.g., "jayyid," "good"), or the phrase *bism Allāh*, "In the name of God," which is clearly a slogan of monotheist rather than strictly Islamic content, however important it may eventually have become as part of a developing Islamic rhetoric.[2] The first mention of Muhammad on Islamic coins so far discovered is on an issue of 66 and 67 A.H., issued in Bishapur by the governor 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abdallāh.[3] Mention of Muhammad, usually as part of the *shahāda*, begins to occur regularly only with the innovations in coinage of 'Abd al-Malik (ruled 65-86/685-705).[4]

1. Cf. P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph* (Cambridge, 1986), 24-26.

2. Crone and Hinds, *loc. cit.* I am indebted to Stuart D. Sears for much detailed information on early Islamic coinage. Some of his work on this subject appeared in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago, *A Monetary History of Iraq and Iran, ca. 570 to 750* (1997).

3. It was, in other words, not issued as part of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik's experimentation with or reform of the currency. The coins in question bear the legends *bism Allāh / Muhammad rasūl Allāh*. See John Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum, I: Arab-Sassanian Coins* (London, 1941), 97; Crone and Hinds, *God's Caliph*, 25; discussed also in Stuart D. Sears, "A Pahlavi Imitation of the Experimental and Reformed Coinage of the Umayyads," *American Journal of Numismatics* 2, no. 1 (1989), 137-169. (Mr. Sears informs me that his conclusions about the "Pahlavi imitation" coin must now be revised in light of the recent discovery of similar coins in a hoard from A.H. 72.)

4. Michael L. Bates, "The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads, 692-750 A.D.," in M. Adnan Bakhit and Robert Schick (eds.), *The History of Bilād al-Shām during the Umayyad Period* [Fourth International Conference on the History of Bilād al-Shām, Amman: Proceedings of the Third Symposium, 24-29 October 1987] (Amman, 1989), 195-228.

The inscriptional record is equally striking. Arabic inscriptions from the first seventy years of the first Islamic century (some of which include quotations or paraphrases of the Qur'an) make no reference to the prophet; many are invocations of God, requests for divine mercy, and the like that, while filled with monotheist piety, are not distinctively "Islamic."[1] The earliest dated inscription mentioning Muhammad still seems to be on an Egyptian tombstone bearing the date 71 A.H.[2]

This absence of documentary mention of Muhammad dating from the first 70 years of the Islamic era means, I think, not that Muhammad did not exist, but as I have stated above merely that the early Believers were not particularly concerned with defining precisely what was his status as messenger or prophet. This they simply accepted as uncontroversial, turning their main attention to the essence of his message—the need to recognize God's oneness and omnipotence, and to live by God's law in preparation for the End. The Believers may only have begun to emphasize Muhammad's status as prophet or apostle when some Jews or Christians began to challenge his prophetic status[3]—perhaps because of the apparent delay of *parousia*, or as a result of better

1. Many valuable Arabic (and some Greek) inscriptions of the first century A.H. have been discovered subsequent to the publication of E. Combe, J. Sauvaget, and G. Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, I (Cairo: Institute Français d'Archéologie Orientale. 1931.) A somewhat more up-to-date listing of early inscriptions and their publications is found in Adolf Grohmann, *Arabische Paläeographie* 2 (Wien: 1971), 71-75. Note also the following: M. Sharon, "An Arabic Inscription from the Time of 'Abd al-Malik," *BSOAS* 29 (1966), 367-72 (milestone from Palestine, A.H. 73); Judith Green and Yoram Tsafrir, "Greek Inscriptions from Hammat Gadar," *Israel Exploration Journal* 32 (1982), 94-96 (building inscription from A.H. 42) Undated inscriptions (and a few dated ones) belonging to the late first or early second century A.H., are found in Muhammad Abū al-Faraj al-'Ishsh, "Kitābāt 'arabiyya ghayr manshūra fī jabal Usays," *Al-Abhath* 17 (1964), 227-316; Dimitri Baramki, "Al-Nuqūsh al-'arabiyya fī al-bādiya al-Sūriyya," *Al-Abhath* 17 (1964), 317-344 (mostly Abbasid and later); M. Sharon, "Five Arabic Inscriptions from Rehovoth and Sinai," *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993), 50-59; Yehuda D. Nevo, "A New Negev Arabic Inscription," *BSOAS* 52 (1989), 18-23.

2. Hassan Mohammed el-Hawary, "The Second Oldest Islamic Monument Known, Dated A.H. 71 (A.D. 691)," *JRAS* (1932), 289-293. Also early, but undated, is an inscription including the phrase "God and His angels bless the prophet; oh, you who believe, ask blessings upon him," quoted in George C. Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ta'if in the Hijaz," *JNES* 7 (1948), 236-242; also the early, undated inscriptions from the Negev, published in Y. Nevo, Z. Cohen, and D. Heftmann, *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev*, I, e.g. numbers MM 107 (1), MM 104(1), SC 301(3), HS 3154(6), and HS 3155-6(6) (the last dated 117/735), etc.

3. On this, see Sarah Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985), 101-114.

knowledge on their part of the Qur'an.

Nor is it clear how contemporary Christians and Jews, within Arabia and outside it, would initially have responded to Muhammad's status as prophet and apostle (and the Qur'anic references to it). Their reactions to Muhammad's preaching—particularly after Muhammad's death—might well have depended upon what the first Believers themselves understood his status to have been.[1] Yet, even those Jews and Christians who might have been reticent about recognizing Muhammad as prophet might have been initially sympathetic to his preachings if most early Believers viewed Muhammad essentially as an inspired preacher striving to attain his community's salvation by purifying it. Alternatively, the Jewish and Christian communities with which Muhammad and his immediate followers first came into contact may have had a looser conception of prophecy or apostleship; the reaction may have set in only when the Believers came into contact with the more theologically developed Jewish and Christian communities of the Fertile Crescent.

The seventh-century Syriac sources produced by both the Nestorian and Jacobite communities of Syria and Iraq provide some early evidence about how Muhammad and the Believers were viewed by, at least, contemporary Christians. These sources rarely refer to Muhammad as "prophet" or "apostle," designating him instead merely the first

1. Theophanes (9th century), *Chronographia* (ed. Carolus de Boor, Leipzig: Teubner, 1883, reprint Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1963) I, 333 (anno 622), calls Muhammad the "ruler and false prophet of the Saracens" (*ho tōn sarakēnōn archēgos kai pseudoprophētēs*) and states that some "Hebrews," deceived at the start, thought him the expected messiah (*ton par autois prosdokōmenon christon*); they were ten in number (!) and gave up the religion of Moses. (Translation, to be used with caution, in Harry Turtledove (transl.), *The Chronicle of Theophanes* [Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982], 34.) This passage seems to present Muhammad's religion as a confession distinct from Judaism from the outset, but this may be an interpolation by Theophanes of the later Islamic tradition's own view, which stressed Islam's original distinctness. Theophanes derived other material from the Muslim tradition, so we cannot consider him an independent source. On this see Lawrence I. Conrad, "Theophanes and the Arabic Historical Tradition: Some Indications of Intercultural Transmission," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 15 (1990), 1-44. The reference to such a small number of "converts"—ten—may be a garbled vestige of the Islamic tradition's account of the first 'Aqaba meeting, when Muhammad won the support of the first twelve Medinese—who were, however, not Jews, at least not according to Muslim tradition: cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīrat rasūl Allāh* (= *Das Leben Muhammeds*, ed. Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, 2 vols., Göttingen: Dieterisch, 1858-60) I, 288-90 (transl. Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad* [London: Oxford University Press, 1955] 198-199.)

"king" of the Arabs.[1] Generally, Syriac sources from before the late 7th century C.E. refer to the Believers as *mahgrāyē* or *mhaggrāyē*—that is, "Hagarenes," i.e., descendants of Abraham by the slave-girl Hagar. This term seems to have had pejorative overtones at times, but at others it may simply have been a way of identifying "Arabs," like its predecessor, the Greek *Agarenoi*.[2] The striking thing, in view of the hypothesis advanced here, is that Syriac theological texts of the seventh century focus on polemics against Jews or against rival forms of Christianity, but not against the *mhaggrāyē*; the *mhaggrāyē* are mentioned in these early texts not as the objects of the polemic, but as passive observers or, in one case, as vague allies of the Christians against the Jews—presumably, because the *mhaggrāyē*, like the Christians, spoke of "Jesus, son of Mary" as the messiah.[3] The fact that Christian polemics of the seventh century were not directed against the *mhaggrāyē* suggests that they were not yet seen by Christian polemicists as a clearly defined, distinct religious community.

The Nestorian monk Yohannan bar Penkayē of northern Mesopotamia, writing in the late 680s, appears to confirm some of our views of the nature of Muhammad's initial mission.[4] A crucial passage of the text reads as follows:[5] "They received, as I have said before,[6] a certain commandment from him who was guide [*mhaddyānā*] to

1. S. P. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islam* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1982), 9-21, at p. 14. Whether the Syriac sources describe Muhammad in this way because they wanted to play down his prophetic status, or because the claim was not yet being made, is not indicated.

2. The exact meaning and provenance of the term *mhaggrāyē* in Syriac is disputed; besides the association with Hagar, there is also the possibility of a connection with the Arabic term *muhājirūn*. For discussion, see Sidney H. Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad, His Scripture and His Message According to the Christian Apologies in Arabic and Syriac from the First Abbasid Century," in Toufic Fahd (ed.), *La Vie du Prophète Mahomet*, Colloque de Strasbourg, octobre 1980 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983), 99-146, at pp. 122-124.

3. See the valuable study of G. J. Reinink, "The Beginnings of Syriac Apologetic Literature in Response to Islam," *Oriens Christianus* 77 (1993), 165-187, at 168-70. The Qur'anic reference to "Jesus, son of Mary" occurs in Sūrat Āl 'Imrān (3), 44.

4. Reinink, 167, provides an analysis of aspects of this text relevant to the present discussion.

5. Text of Bar-Penkayē: Alfons Mingana, *Sources Syriaques* I (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, for Imprimerie des Pères Dominicains à Mossoul, 1907-8), 146* line 14-147*, line 1.

6. Bar-Penkayē had spoken of this "commandment" earlier in the text: Mingana I, *141, lines 15-19.

them, concerning all Christians and for the class of monks; they received from the guidance of this one also the worship of one God, according to the customs of the ancient law.[1] At the outset, however, they were so attached to the tradition of Muhammad [*mashlmânâiteh d-muhammad*], he who was their teacher, that he decreed the sentence of death on anyone who would publicly rebel against his commandments."[2] As Reinink point out, it is noteworthy that Bar Penkayê does not call Muhammad a prophet or apostle—only "guide" [*mhaddyânâ*] and "teacher" [*tar'â*][3] The word "guide" seems quite appropriate for Muhammad from what we know of the Qur'an, which repeatedly refers to itself as *hudâ*, "guidance," or at least as a source of guidance. The passage also underscores the intense emphasis on piety and the importance attached by the *mhaggrâyê* (= Believers) to living in accordance with the revealed law (Syr. *nâmûsâ*).

The text continues as follows:[4] "Their armies used to go in each year to distant lands and provinces, raiding and plundering from all peoples under heaven. And from every person they demanded only tribute, and each one could remain in whatever faith he chose.[5] There were also among them Christians, not a few, some of them with [i.e. belonging to] the heretics [i.e., the monophysites] and some with us." Crucial in this passage, for our concerns, is Bar-Penkayê's explicit statement that "among them"—that is, among the *mhaggrâyê* or Believers—were many Christians, both Nestorians and monophysites. Certainly this Nestorian Christian did not yet see a rigid confessional barrier separating the *mhaggrâyê* from Christians, even of his own kind; Christians could join the *mhaggrâyê* or Believers and still be reckoned Christians. Equally important is the

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2. *aykannâ d-gzâr dînâ d-mawtâ nayôn 'al hâw d-mettlzê d-mamraH 'al nâmûsawh.*

3. Cf. Reinink. 167.

4. Bar-Penkayê/Mingana I, 147*, lines 1-6.

5. *wa-dh-baydâ haymânûthâ nkattar l-Sebhyâneh yahtbin wâw.*

1. *ayk 'yârê d-nâmûsâ 'atiqâ.* Reinink glosses "ancient law" as "the Torah," but if Bar-Penkayê had meant Torah specifically, one might have expected him to use the word *'urâythâ*; cf. note 87 below. The Qur'an implies that the Torah was not viewed by Believers as the ancient law itself, but merely as one "edition" or avatar of God's law (*dîn*). Michael Wise suggests that the phrase *nâmûsâ 'atiqâ* in Bar Penkayê might mean either be an allusion to the concept of natural law (cf. Romans 2:14: "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature that which the law requires [*physei ta tou nomou poiôsin*], they are a law unto themselves . . .") or to the notion, widespread in the hellenistic period, of "ancestral custom."

suggestion that Believers let people belong to whatever faith [*haymanutha*] they wanted, suggesting that the Believers defined themselves non-confessionally.[1]

Another early Syriac text, an account of the disputation between a leader (*amir*) of the *mhaggrâyê* and a Jacobite patriarch, appears to date from the early eighth century or, at the earliest, the last decade of the seventh century,[2] and reflects a time when the broader definition of the original community of Believers was beginning to give way to a narrower and more exclusive definition of the original community of Muslims. In one passage of the disputation, the *amir* asks the patriarch to explain why, if the Gospel is one, the Christians are divided into different sects. To this the patriarch responds, "Just as the law[3] is one and the same, and accepted by us Christians and by you *mhaggrâyê* and by the Jews and Samaritans, yet each people [*'ammâ*] is divided by [their] faith [*haymanûthâ*] . . ."[4] That is, he argues that the existence of sects, like the existence of different religions, is due to divergent interpretations of the law. This passage implies that the *mhaggrâyê* are considered by the patriarch a religious confession distinct from Christians, Jews, and Samaritans; it is also interesting, however, that he describes all these groups as accepting the law of Moses. It is in this vein that we should probably understand the patriarch's later comment to the Hagarenes that "you say that you accept Moses and his writings."[5] He apparently does not mean that the *mhaggrâyê* were some kind of neo-Jews, but merely that, like Christians and the other monotheists just mentioned, the *mhaggrâyê* accept God's law

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1. Brock, "Syriac Views," 17, understands these passages only as evidence that Bar-Penkayê "sees the new rulers in ethnic and not religious terms."

2. This text has traditionally been dated to 644 C.E., but Reinink (pp. 171-187, building on Griffith, "The Prophet Muhammad . . ." 100, and L. Sako, "Bibliographie du dialogue islamo-chrétien. Auteurs chrétiens de langue syriaque," *Islamochristiana* 10 (1984), 273-292, at 277) has convincingly argued for the later date, and studied the issues raised here.

3. Or: "the Torah" (Syr. *'urâythâ'*); but the rest of the sentence, in which he speaks of the Christians accepting it, suggests that the more general sense of "God's law" is meant, rather than "Torah" as the law specifically of Jews. Michael Wise informs me that *'urâythâ'*, the essential meaning of which is "something translated," was often used in Syriac for the Targumim; might it also have been used for the New Testament translated from Greek into Syriac?

4. F. Nau, "Un colloque du patriarche Jean avec l'émir des Agaréens, et faits divers des années 712 à 716," *Journal Asiatique* 11/5 (1915), 225-279, at p. 248, lines 5 and 6 from bottom (text); 257-58 (translation). See Reinink, 178.

5. *I-môshê ger wal-kthabhawy emartôn d-mqabhlayôn.* Nau, "Un colloque . . . ," 249, lines 10-11 (text); 258 (translation).

as revealed to, among others, Moses.

That this divine law existed in different forms is made clear by another passage, one that implies that the mhaggrāyē /Believers allowed people within the community of Believers to follow different versions of the law—the Torah, the Gospels, or Qur'anic law. The amir says, "I demand [that you] do one of three things: either to show me that your laws[1] are written in the Gospel, and to conduct yourselves according to them; or to follow the law of the mahgrā."[2] In other words, the amir insists on the importance of following the law, but gives his interlocutor the choice of whether to follow the law of the Gospel or the law of the mahgrā, by which he presumably meant Qur'anic law. It is worth noting also the use, in this Syriac text, of the root sh-l-m, cognate to the Arabic root from which the word islām is derived, in the meaning of to follow the law. This seems to confirm the idea presented above, that Arabic islām initially meant "to submit to, or live in accordance with, God's law."

Even the text of the disputation, however—despite its embryonic sense of Muslims as a distinct religious community—makes no reference to the prophethood or apostleship of Muhammad; indeed, Muhammad is not mentioned at all. The disputation does confirm, however, that the mhaggrāyē were by the end of the 7th century C.E. beginning to focus on the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus as a point unacceptable to them[3]—something we know already from the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock.

The obvious fact to be drawn from Muslim tradition, of course, is that the community of Believers eventually did come to place great importance on Muhammad's status as messenger and prophet. Indeed, the notion that Muhammad was messenger and prophet came to be virtually the decisive feature defining Islam as a distinct confession. It seems likely that the relinquishing of a broader identity as Believers and the crystallization of a separate religious identity as Muslims, distinct from other monotheisms, took place concomitant with the increasing emphasis on the importance of Muhammad's prophetic

1. námisē.
2. teshlmūn t-nāmūsā d-mahgrā. Nau, "Un colloque . . .," 251, penultimate line-252, line 2 (text); 262 (translation).
3. Nau, "Un colloque . . .," 250, line 14-251, line 11 (text); 260-61 (translation) Cf Reinink, "Beginnings . . .," note 72.

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or apostolic status among Believers.[1]

The standard Muslim shahāda or statement of faith—first of the "five pillars" or minimal ritual requirements that came to define a Muslim—may itself contain a hint that the community began as a community of Believers in God and the Last Day, and only subsequently became a community of people who believed in God, the Last Day, and the prophethood of Muhammad, and who thereby claimed a confessional identity as Muslims distinct from Christians, Jews, and other monotheists. The shahāda consists of two parts or sentences, said one immediately after the other, "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the apostle [rasūl] of God." Obviously, the first part is something that any early Believer—whatever his monotheist confession—could have said in good faith. The second part, however, is something only a Muslim can say in good faith, and its presence in the shahāda separates Muslims decisively from other monotheists.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine exactly when the shahāda first came into use. It is, however, noteworthy that the first documentary attestations of the shahāda include only the first element—not the second. The first documentary attestation of something resembling a complete shahāda, with both elements, occurs on the coins minted in Bishapur in 66 and 67 A.H (685-687 C.E.).[2] The first full shahāda in Arabic appears to be on a Damascus coin of A.H. 72-74, part of the first phase of 'Abd al-Malik's reform effort.[3] We may suggest, tentatively, that the second part of the shahāda was only added to the statement of faith at a point when the community of Believers was redefining itself in a way that now excluded Christians, Jews, and perhaps members of some other monotheist confessions who had once been members of the community—a development that probably took place sometime in the third quarter of the first century A.H. A distant reflection of this process of growth may exist in the fact that one occasionally encounters references in Islamic juridical literature to the "two shahādas"—an expression that

1. On this, see Andrae, Die Person Muhammeds, esp. 245: "The growing self-consciousness of the Islamic community is signaled above all in the manner in which the precedence of Muhammad over all other prophets is asserted."
2. See page 40 and note 3, above. The fact that a wide range of variants of the shahāda phrases is found on this and other coins from the 60s and 70s A.H. suggests that the shahāda phraseology had not yet stabilized—which, in turn, suggests that these instances occur near the beginning of the shahāda's evolution.
3. Bates, "The Coinage of Syria under the Umayyads . . .," 198.

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suggests that each of the two elements originally constituted a *shahāda* in itself.[1]

It seems possible, in other words, that the traditional Muslim *shahāda*, as it has been said for centuries, embodies in its two phrases the two phases in the growth of the community[2]—from community of Believers to community of Muslims, "Muslim" now re-defined to mean not just a strict monotheist Believer who adhered to some version of God's revealed law, but a monotheist Believer who was not a Christian or Jew, who believed also in Muhammad's apostleship and was pledged to observe Qur'anic law.

VI.

As we have seen, the hypothesis that the early community of Believers was open to some Jews, Christians, and perhaps other monotheists, and that those confessional groups only later found themselves defined out of the community of Believers as the latter clarified their identity as Muslims, is not free of complications and apparently contradictory evidence. On the other hand, it seems to me that such a hypothesis fits more smoothly with some other evidence about the early Islamic period than does the traditional interpretation of the origins of Islam.

First of all, the fact that members of the new community first seem to have called themselves "Believers"—not "Muslims"—appears confirmed by two early inscriptions, which refer to Muʿāwiya as *amīr al-muʾminīn*, "commander of the Believers,"[3] and by a papyrus document that speaks of "year forty-two of the rule of the Believers" [*sanat ithnayn wa arbaʿīn sanat qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn*].[4] These may be taken as a hint that the Believers' identity as Muslims, and as such distinct from Christians and Jews, had not yet

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1. E.g., Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Qudūrī, *Matn al-Qudūrī fī fiqh madhhab al-imām al-aʿẓam Abī Ḥanīfa al-Nuʿmān* (Cairo: al-Khayriyya Press, 1324/1906), 17 middle (first sentence of *Bāb al-janāʾiz*): "When [death] approaches the [dying] man, he is made to face the *qibla* on his right side, and prompted with the two *shahādas* . . ."

2. Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Korans*, 52, discusses the two-part *shahāda* briefly; he assumes the first element to be Meccan, the second to be added in Medina.

3. Cf. Miles, "Early Islamic Inscriptions near Ṭāʾif . . .;" Green and Tsafrir, "Greek Inscriptions from Hammat Gader." Al-ʿIshsh, "Nuqūsh ʿarabiyya," no. 36 (p. 257-58) mentions "Khālid, son of *amīr al-muʾminīn*."

4. This document, in the corpus identified by Jean David-Weill, will be published by Yusuf Raghib. The only other papyrus Dr. Raghib is aware of that uses the phrase *qaḍāʾ al-muʾminīn*, Vienna A1119, is undated, but he assigns it to the first century A.H. on palaeographical grounds. I thank Dr. Raghib for making this information available to me (personal letter, November 1994).

definitively crystallized. Similarly, a common salutation on documents written by Believers of the first century A.H. is *al-salām ʿalā man ittabaʿa al-hudā*, "Salvation to whoever follows the Guidance."[1] The Qur'an describes itself in many places as "guidance" (*hudā*), but it also refers to the Old and New Testaments in the same way (or, at least, says they provide guidance).[2] And the phrase "Salvation to whoever follows the Guidance" is itself Qur'anic—and is uttered by God to the children of Israel.[3] So this common "early Islamic" phrase might be seen as not so exclusively Islamic, but more broadly "Believer-ish."

The attitude of the early Believers to Christians, at least from the testimony of some sources, also does not suggest that they saw the latter as dangerous religious adversaries. Around 650 C.E., the Nestorian patriarch Ishoʿyahb III wrote that "the Arabs not only do not fight Christianity, they even recommend our religion, honour our priests and saints of our Lord, and make gifts to monasteries and churches."[4]

A possible vestige of the non-confessional nature of the original community of Believers may exist in the absence of special rituals for conversion to Islam. Other confessional monotheisms require some rite of passage to mark the convert's passage into the confessional community—baptism, confirmation, circumcision, etc. The only requirement for membership in the Islamic community, however, is that one say the *shahāda* three times, and mean it.[5] This "openness" may be a vestige of times when the boundaries between Believers and monotheists of various confessions were very fluid, or non-existent.

The Islamic literary sources, although written after the crystallization of Islam (in the

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1. E.g., C.H. Becker, *Papyri Schott-Reinhardt* 1 (Heidelberg, 1906), 58-61 (PSR Inv. Heid. Arab. 1-2, line 28); also 1, 68-76 (PSR Inv. Heid. Arab. 3-7, lines 87-88).

2. E.g., Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (3), 4: Sūrat al-Māʾida (5), 44 and 46.

3. Sūrat Ṭā Hā (20), 47.

4. Ishoʿyahb Patriarchae III, *Liber Epistolarum* (C.S.C.O, Scriptores Syri, ser. III/64, 251); Cf. Tor Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*, 167; S. P. Brock, "Syriac Views of Emergent Islam," 15. Quoted also in Andrae, *In the Garden of Myrtles*, p. 8, but with wrong source attribution in notes.

5. Although circumcision has become an important rite of passage in most Islamic societies, it is not mentioned in the Qur'an, and there is nothing in Islamic law to compare with the role of circumcision as a sign of God's covenant with the Hebrews, cf. Gen. 17:11-14. On circumcision in Islam, *EI* (2) "Khitān" (A. J. Wensinck), and the interesting evidence and comments of Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, 12-13.

full sense, as a distinct religious confession), also sometimes contain reports that suggest an early fluidity in "communal" relations among Believers and the other monotheists among whom they lived, especially Christians and Jews. Muhammad is said to have written to the Arab chieftain al-Mundhir ibn Sāwī of Baḥrayn (eastern Arabia), "Whoever prays our prayers, and faces our qibla, and eats our [ritually slaughtered] meat [dhabiha] is a Muslim."[1] The controversy over the Muslims'/Believers' changing qibla is an old one that, like Pandora's box, is perhaps best left closed for the present, but the comment on slaughtering is interesting in the context of the hadith that says that Muslims may eat the ritually slaughtered meat of Christians and Jews.

Another body of evidence we might consider is the notion of the early Islamic conquests. The success of the conquests seems virtually beyond plausible historical explanation if we adhere to the idea that the early Muslims—i.e., the early Believers—not only constituted a self-contained and self-conscious political community, but also saw themselves as belonging to a new religious confession distinct from Christianity, Judaism, and other monotheisms—as they are generally portrayed in both the Islamic sources and in most secondary literature.[2] It is not particularly problematic to argue that the early Muslims/Believers may have been able to beat the odds by defeating the armies of the Byzantines and Sasanians—such military upsets are not that rare in the annals of history. Having defeated the enemy armies in the short term, however, how were the small groups of conquerors able to impose their rule in the long term upon vast, well-entrenched local populations with highly articulated notions of religious identity? If we assume that the conquerors were from the start representatives of an alien and hostile new creed, Islam, it seems highly improbable that they would have succeeded; the local populations would have resisted the Muslims from the outset, and it would have been difficult for the latter to secure a foothold. If we see the conquerors not as confessionally exclusive Muslims, however, but rather as monotheist Believers who might have been sympathetic to other monotheists among the conquered peoples,

1. Ibn al-Athīr, Usd al-ghāba fī ma'rifat al-ṣaḥāba (5 vols, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Wahbiyya, 1280/1863-4; reprinted Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, n.d [ca. 1980?]) 4, 417 (s.v. "al-Mundhir b. Sāwī"). As Patricia Crone pointed out to me, this provision is Qur'anic (personal letter, May, 1994); see Sūrat al-Mā'ida (5): 5, "The food of those to whom the Book was brought is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them."

2. Including my own The Early Islamic Conquests (Princeton, 1981).

the long-term success in the aftermath of the conquests appears more plausible. Seen in this way, the Believers may initially have been viewed by the Jewish and Christian (and perhaps other monotheist) communities in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere almost as champions and purifiers of religious ideas to which these communities already subscribed, or at least paid lip-service.[1] The Believers were insisting on strict adherence to the idea of monotheism; they were consumed by, and intensely motivated by, dread of the coming Last Judgment; and they were enforcing strict observance of the revealed law, particularly in matters of ritual and worship. For the Christians and Jews of the Near East, these were not strange or alien ideas, but thoroughly familiar ones. The devout among them may have resented somewhat that these bumpkins from Arabia were preaching to them, much as a traffic safety instructor resents being chided by his teen-aged son for going a bit over the speed limit, but few would have resisted the validity and cogency of the basic message—all the moreso because, at first, the Believers' ideas were probably known only from slogans, because recent events seemed to provide "signs" that God was on the Believers' side, and because of the palpable urgency and intensity with which the Believers' message was doubtless delivered.

It may be noteworthy in this context that the early Believers established some of their first mosques in the places of worship of the ahl al-kitāb.[2] The best-known example, of course, is the Believers' use of the Church of St. John in Damascus as their place of prayer. The situation in Jerusalem is harder to unravel, but recent work suggests that the Believers first worshipped in part of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, moving at the time of Mu'āwiya to Mt. Moriah, site of the former temple, where slightly later would be built the al-Aqṣā mosque and the Dome of the Rock.[3] The usual interpretation of this process—at least as far as the Church of St. John is concerned—is that the Muslims "appropriated" part of the church, later all of it, and

1. T. Nagel, "Muhammads Haltung zu den anderen Religionen," 199: "Den Schriftbesitzern gegenüber ist Muhammad ein Reformer . . ."

2. Sharon, "The Birth of Islam in the Holy Land," 228, also notes this.

3. On Jerusalem see Heribert Busse, "Die 'Umar-Moschee im östlichen Atrium der Grabeskirche," ZDPV 109 (1993), 73-82; also H. Busse, "'Omar's Image as the Conqueror of Jerusalem," JSAI 8 (1986), 149-168; H. Busse, "'Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb in Jerusalem," Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam 5 (1984), 73-119, H. Busse, "Monotheismus und islamische Christologie in der Bauinschrift des Felsendoms in Jerusalem," Theologische Quartalschrift 161 (1981), 168-178.

converted it to their mosque, in the process barring the Christians from holding their worship there.[1] It might be more natural to assume, however, that the first Believers who arrived in Damascus (and elsewhere) naturally took to holding their communal devotions in the established places of worship, along with local Christian (and Jewish?) Believers. Given the Believers' insistence on piety, they may have imposed their own stringent approach to ritual on those devotions, but this coming together in worship of the Arabian Believers and Christian or Jewish Believers in the decades before the community of Believers split into separate religious confessions might help explain some of the similarities that have been noted between Christian and Jewish religious rituals and such Muslim rituals as the prayer service.[2]

Later, of course, when the community of Believers had become the community of Muslims—that is, when the Believers, through a process still to be clarified, came (or were forced by circumstances) to think of themselves also as a distinct religious confession—Muslim tradition would carefully attempt to bury, or "forget," the absence of strict confessional barriers that marked the early days of the community of Believers. But, at the outset, this strict self-definition in confessional terms was not there. Why, after all, should the Believers have cared much what confession people belonged to, as long as they recognized the oneness of God? There were much more important things on their minds. Time was short; the End was coming. All that really mattered was that those who Believed in God's oneness and primacy, who Believed in the urgency of proper pious action in accordance with God's revealed law, and who looked for the establishment, as far as possible, of righteousness in the world, ally with one another to form a community that could attain eternal salvation, when the trumpet of Israfil sounded and mankind assembled for the last time to face its Creator.

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1. Cf. also Hama; Kāmil Shahāda, "Al-Jāmi' al-a'lā al-kabīr fī Hāma," *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 26 (1976), 193-246, esp. 196-97, on conversion of church to mosque.

2. See, for example, C. H. Becker, "Die Kanzel im Kultus des alten Islam," *Orientalische Studien Theodor Nöldeke...gewidmet* (Gießen, 1906), 331-51, and the rejoinder by Eugen Mittwoch, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des islamischen Gebets und Kultus," *Abhandlungen der königlichen Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 1913 no. 2 (Phil.-Hist. Kl.), 3-42.

Bibliographical Addendum

Since this essay was drafted in 1994, the following works have appeared that bear some relevance to the arguments advanced here:

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